

Sustainability Brings Grad Students Together



This October, as part of Campus Sustainability Week, graduate students from a disparate array of colleges, schools and departments stepped away from their offices and labs to mingle around a unifying topic: sustainability.

Sustainability on Tap combines rapid-fire Power Point presentations, pints of beer courtesy of Black Star Co-op, and an assortment of mugs as varied as the presentations. The mugs guarantee that the event is zero waste; a cowbell guarantees that the presentations move along at a rapid, often hilarious, clip.

"Let's get started everyone!" Silence falls as Brianna Duran, program coordinator in the Office of Sustainability, clunks the bell. "AV got our slides working, so no interpretative dance is needed this time!"

First up is Jacob Copple, a third year advertising doctoral student from the Moody College of Communication. He has three minutes to explain how climate change messaging might be tailored if eliciting emotional responses: his research found that hope leads to thinking about your own life while sadness leads to concern for others.

Copple barely finishes, rushing for the last 20 seconds, before the bell signals the next presentation.

It takes about two hours—and more than a few laughs—to learn how varied sustainability research is on campus: measuring the paleoclimate of Texas (Chijun Sun, Geology), finding solutions to climate change in rural areas (Philip Jankoski, LBJ School of Public Affairs), discussing threats to vulnerable populations in the Peruvian Amazon (Aaron Groth, Geography), discovering sources of pollution in New Delhi (Shahzad Gani, Civil Engineering), reminding all about role of NASA databases in sustainable development (Matthew Preisser, LBJ and Cockrell Schools), finding ways to improve indoor air quality and reduce communicable disease (Sangeetha Kumar, Civil Engineering), and focusing on sustainable fashion (Elaine Almeida, Advertising).

One of the last students to present is Steven Richter of the School of Architecture. As part of the Planet Texas 2050 research team, he is conducting social and environmental analysis of cities across the state to understand the difference in resilience between cities.

"What does urbanization mean across Texas?" Richter asks. "We are looking at interdisciplinary questions, like how socio-economic patterns or changes in the built environment affect municipal water or energy use across the state."

"Sustainability on Tap is fast becoming a tradition," says Duran. "I'm looking forward to what I will learn about next semester when we host this event again!"